



**NORTH CAROLINA STATE CONFERENCE**

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## Why We Are Here Today

April 29, 2013  
NC General Assembly  
16 W Jones Street, Raleigh, NC

*North Carolinians Who Choose Nonviolent Civil Disobedience in the Face of an Avalanche of Extremist Policies That Threaten Healthcare, Education, Voting Rights, Especially the Poor, African-Americans, Latinos, Women, Seniors and Students*

### NC Constitution Article 1 Declaration of Rights (Section 1,2,3)

*We hold it to be self-evident that all persons are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, the enjoyment of the fruits of their own labor, and the pursuit of happiness.*

*All political power is vested in and derived from the people; all government of right originates from the people, is founded upon their will only, and is instituted solely for the good of the whole.*

*The people of this State have the inherent, sole, and exclusive right of regulating the internal government and police thereof, and of altering or abolishing their Constitution and form of government whenever it may be necessary to their safety and happiness; but every such right shall be exercised in pursuance of law and consistently with the Constitution of the United States.*

**The book of Micah asks us,** “What does the Lord require of you? But to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God.” It is in a spirit of openness to the prophet's question that we gather here as people of faith and citizens of North Carolina. We have written to Governor McCrory and to the NC General Assembly, asking them to reconsider their assault on the poor, the unemployed, our many citizens without healthcare and our embattled public schools.

They have already voted to:

- Deny federal funds for Medicaid to 500,000 poor North Carolinians.
- Take unemployment benefits from 165,000 North Carolinians.
- Raise taxes on 900,000 of North Carolina's poor and working poor by ending the Earned Income Tax Credit to pay for tax cuts to 23 millionaires.

They took over a billion dollars last year from public education, made plans to implement a voucher plan to hand out public money to private schools, and reduce eligibility to preschool for poor children.

And they are now trying to:

- Re-start the death penalty and repeal the Racial Justice Act that has exposed the racially discriminatory application of the death penalty.
- Codify anti-labor language in our state constitution.
- Roll back Early Voting, ban Sunday Voting, end same-day registration; impose an unneeded poll tax disguised as a Voter ID bill that will cost the state millions; deny student IDs from private schools; make former felons wait 5 years to vote after paying their debt to society; deny parents a \$2500 tax credit if their college student does not vote at home; and leave us with voting laws more restrictive than Alabama and South Carolina. When you pursue policies that hurt most voters, you cannot afford a big turnout.

Many of those pushing this agenda got into public office because of a race-based redistricting plan that is the most discriminatory since the 19th century. Its racial impact is undeniable. And the Voter ID bill is simply a modern poll tax in disguise, even more restrictive than the ones passed in Alabama and South Carolina. Ending the popular Early Voting and Sunday Voting is an outrage. They do not want the people to vote. And this is only the first 50 days of their work. We haven't even seen the final budget.

The policies pursued in these chambers will devastate hundreds of thousands of North Carolinians who are already suffering. The leadership of this Republican "super-majority" are deaf to the cries of those whom Jesus called "the least of these."

Early on, just after they were elected, we brought thousands of North Carolina citizens to Jones Street for the seventh annual Historic Thousands on Jones Street Peoples Coalition Assembly, and placed before our General Assembly a forward-moving agenda. We lifted up five principles that we believed were bigger than Democrat or Republican but good for the whole:

1) **Economic sustainability and ending poverty** by fighting for full employment, living wages, the alleviation of disparate unemployment, a green economy, labor rights, affordable housing, targeted empowerment zones, strong safety net services for the poor, fair policies for immigrants, infrastructure development and fair tax reform. 2) **Educational equality** by ensuring every child receives a high quality, well-funded, Constitutional, diverse public education, access to Community Colleges and Universities and equitable funding for minority colleges and universities. 3) **Healthcare for all** by ensuring access to the Affordable Care Act, Medicare and Medicaid, Social Security and providing environmental protection. 4) **Fairness in the criminal justice system** by addressing the continuing inequalities in the system and providing equal protection under the law for black, brown and poor white people. 5) **Voting rights** by defending the right to vote and expanding voting rights for all people by standing against suppression tactics, such as voter ID, restriction of Early Voting, race-based redistricting, or any other effort that undermines equal protection under the law.

Instead they have turned a deaf ear and a defiant posture towards moving forward and instead have chosen to take our state backward.

Surely, in the end, the people will rise up and sweep such leaders from office. Even the Republican leadership knows this to be true. That is why they now seek to reduce the access of eligible voters to the ballot box.

Their unconscionable Voter ID bill is only the best known of their assaults on the sanctity of the ballot. Their claim of voter fraud is fraudulent itself, as even NC Speaker of the House Thom Tillis has been forced to acknowledge. A partisan desire to make it harder to vote and a deep fear of accountability to the voters are what drive this Voter ID mess. The Voter ID menace must be understood alongside Republican efforts to eliminate Early Voting and to outlaw Sunday Voting, even if local communities want to keep these policies that make it easier for everyone to vote.

It must be understood alongside their efforts to keep college students from voting by inflicting a heavy financial penalty on their parents if they attempt to vote away from home. It is part of the package that refuses to accept federal funds to help communities pay for the machinery of democracy through the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) money. We need more, not less, public access to the ballot.

Voter ID must be understood alongside *LaRoque v. Holder*, the lawsuit to overturn the Voting Rights Act of 1965, filed by former Republican leader Stephen LaRoque, who stands before the judgment of our courts today for misdirecting millions of tax dollars into his own pocket. LaRoque says he is "entitled" to the money, but the Republican leadership apparently does not believe voters are entitled to cast a ballot without standing in a long line or making a long drive to a distant polling place.

Apparently, Governor McCrory intends to be the new George Wallace, pushing the so-called "Southern Strategy" of Strom Thurmond, Governor Wallace, and Richard Nixon. The leadership of our General Assembly clearly sees political advantage in blocking the vote, attacking the public schools, and dividing North Carolina even further into the haves and have-nots. We need an economic development strategy that includes all parts and all people of our state. They need to understand that we are a New South; a South rooted in the best traditions of North Carolina.

The Voter ID bill constitutes the most egregious trampling of democracy in these halls. But none of these efforts to decrease voter access to the polls are acceptable. They too, will stand before the judgment of our courts. But we cannot wait for the wheels of justice to grind while this legislature grinds up the poor and downtrodden. We have to bear witness to the moral wrong that is being committed here. We have asked the leadership to rethink their unconstitutional and immoral attack on voting rights. But now the House has passed a ruthless attack on democracy, a poll tax in disguise, an attack on college students, the elderly, minorities and the poor. They have no ears to hear.

So we have no other choice but to assemble in the people's house where these bills are being presented, argued, and voted upon, in hopes that God will move in the hearts of our legislators, as he moved in the heart of Pharaoh to let His people go. Some ask the question, why don't they be quiet? Well, I must remind you, that it has been our collective silence that has quietly opened the city gates to these undemocratic violators of our rights. If we must pray forgiveness for

anything today, it will be the silence with which we have allowed this to happen in the dark. Thoreau said in his famous essay, "Civil Disobedience," that if he had to repent of anything, it would be his good behavior. What possessed me, he asked himself, that I behaved so well in the face of such evil?

As people of faith, we understand that we have been called to be the voice of the voiceless and the shepherd of God's beloved community. What we do here today is only what any responsible shepherd does to alert God's flock to the presence of the predators of democracy.

Make no mistake about it; this is the beginning of something new in the Old North State. This is a new birth much as it was on February 1st, 1960 in Greensboro when four students from North Carolina A&T sat down at the Woolworth's lunch counter and a new generation rose up to freshen the wellsprings of democracy. It is a new birth much as it was in April of 1960 when the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee was born down the street at Shaw University, with students from colleges all over North Carolina and all over the South.

This is the South where our voting rights were won; this is the South where our youth and our elders brought us the Voting Rights Act. It was always a struggle that some called untimely, always a battle between our fears and our hopes, always a disturbance of consciences grown silent with disuse; and sometimes made its path through the blood of the slaughtered. Did anyone really believe that no one here in the ever New South would rise up and say, "No, you will neither divide nor conquer in this our homeland; here is the city of Zion, where God's people bring together the odds and ends of our common necessity and stitch a quilt of matchless beauty; here is where the Nuevo South, in all its patchwork colors, accents and aromas, came together and said, "No mas! Viva la causa! Viva la huelga!" And here we stand, like a tree beside the water, and we shall not be moved.

In the spirit of the ancestors as they speak to the new day, in the spirit of our youth, who see beyond the moment and into the movement, we call on all people of goodwill, regardless of race, political affiliation, or socio-economic background, to examine the tools of the nonviolent moral movement to expose the hurtful, immoral, and unconstitutional policies being passed in the People's House. Those who cannot put on the yoke of nonviolence can still join and support this movement. But if we care about this great state and its entire people, if we wish to act as moral leaders in our homeland, we must shine the light of words and deeds on these shameful attacks on the poor and working families of North Carolina.

We say to the leadership: You rejected federal funds for Medicaid that stripped over a half million poor people of health care. You rejected federal money for unemployment benefits for over 150,000 workers looking for jobs. You have repeatedly disrespected our sisters and brothers from Latin America. You insist on promoting policies to de-fund public education—which will lead to further re-segregation of our children's schools and the eventual abandonment of public education. You cut the tax credit for over 900,000 poor and working people, while giving a tax break to 23 of the wealthiest people in our State. And you introduced your voter suppression law on a day that all African Americans and people of good remember—April 4th—when Dr. King was assassinated for trying to expand the electorate, not take it back to the days of the white-only ballot box. While you take aim at the voting rights of the poor, elderly, students and minorities you seek to make it easier to get guns. You divide the people of North Carolina against one another while putting government into the service of the rich.

Did not Jesus say to us in Matthew 25:

<sup>37</sup> “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?’ <sup>38</sup> When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?’ <sup>39</sup> When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

<sup>40</sup> “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

From the moral framework of the scriptures and our constitution we are calling together a coalition of goodwill, a nonviolent volunteer army of love, to oppose this legislature's heartless, ideologically driven agenda. We call on all people of goodwill to join us, that we might build the bridges of understanding, not the walls of division. We call on all residents of North Carolina who believe in the common good to pray and partner with us as we use the tools of protest and the tactics of nonviolent moral suasion to illuminate for the nation the shameful acts taking place here. We are not alone. We shall speak and we shall act. We will become "the trumpet of conscience" and "the beloved community" that Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called upon us to be, echoing the God of our mothers and fathers in the faith. Now is the time. Here is the place. We are the people. And we will be heard.

**Arrested on April 29, 2013 at the NC General Assembly:**

1. Rev. Dr. William J. Barber, President, NC NAACP, Convener of the Historic Thousands on Jones Street People's Assembly Coalition and Pastor, Greenleaf Christian Church, Goldsboro, NC
2. Marty Belin, Self Help, Durham, NC
3. Rev. Maria Palmer, Member, Binkley Baptist Church, Chapel Hill, NC
4. Bishop Larry Reid, Pastor, Cathedral of Hope Mission Church, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President, Chapel Hill-Carrboro Branch of the NAACP, Chapel Hill, NC
5. Rev. Dr. John Mendez, Pastor, Emmanuel Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, NC
6. Rev. Dr. T. Anthony Spearman, Pastor, Clinton Tabernacle AME Zion Church 3<sup>rd</sup> Vice President, NC NAACP, Hickory, NC
7. Bryan Perlmutter, NC Student Power Union, NC State University, Raleigh, NC
8. Molly McDonough, NC Student Power Union, NC State University, Raleigh, NC
9. Rev. Curtis E. Gatewood, HKonJ Coalition Coordinator, Oxford, NC
10. Rev. Jimmie Hawkins, Pastor, Covenant Presbyterian Church, Member, NC NAACP State Executive Committee Durham, NC
11. Rev. Dr. Nelson Johnson, Pastor, Faith Community Church, Executive Director, Beloved Community Center, Greensboro, NC
12. Bob Zellner, Former Field Secretary, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Wilson, NC
13. Adam Sotak, Democracy NC, Durham, NC
14. Barbara Zelter, Social Worker, Raleigh, NC
15. Dr. Tim Tyson, Professor, Duke University, Chapel Hill, NC
16. Dr. Perri Morgan, PhD, PAC - Duke University School of Medicine, Chapel Hill, NC
17. O'Linda Gillis, President, Moore County NAACP Branch, Chair, NC NAACP Women in the NAACP, Southern Pines, NC